

# Weird Tales

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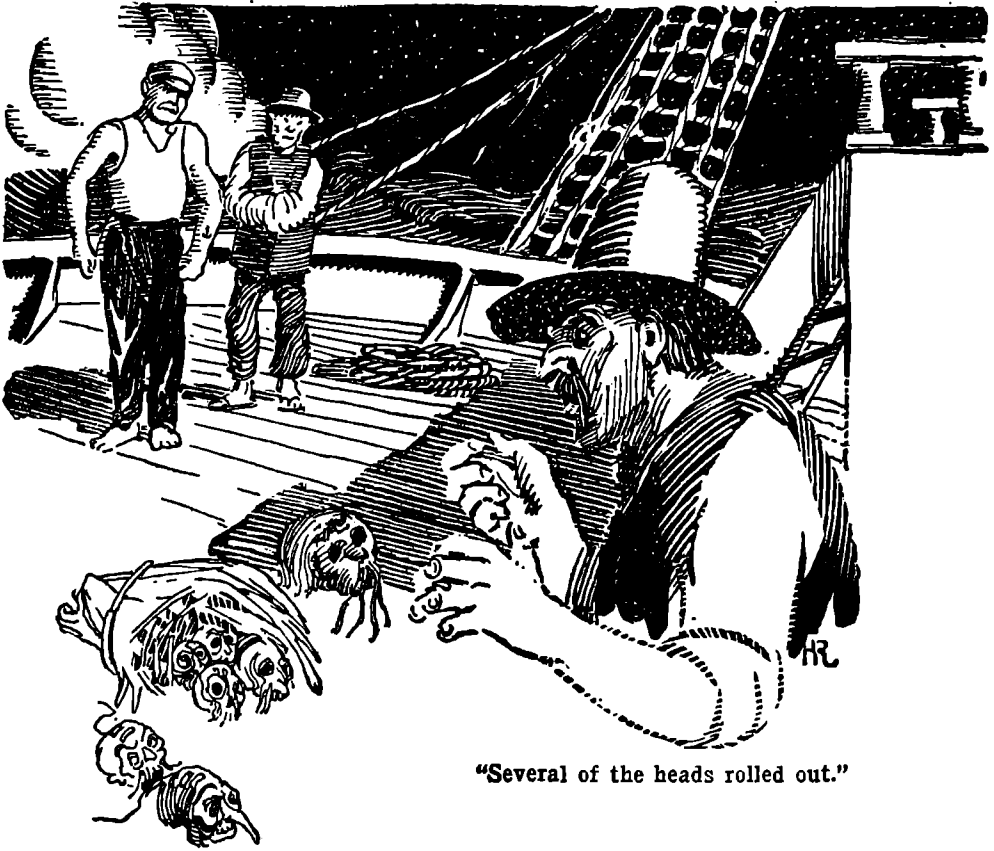
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# The HEAD from ECUADOR by ROBERT LEE HEISER



"Several of the heads rolled out."

ALL up and down the coasts of the world, from the Greasy Spoon hard by the street of a hundred tongues, to Tampa, Florida, and aboard the T. I. O. steamers to Indo-China, you will hear the tale. Always, they add a bit to the telling until, now, the yarn has become quite interesting. Who knows? Perhaps the story is true; anyway—

Beef Mullins, in gaudy pink shirt, tousled of hair, dusky of hide—a half-breed, son of a white beach-comber who went native where the big iron wagons make port in Guayaquil—told the tale originally on the deck of the *Drifting Owl*, with the dome over his head

sprinkled by a million glittering stars, with the water lapping musically against the hull, and the reek of spices, oranges, and the sweet-scented fruit blossoms drifting out from the tropical forests of Ecuador.

The expedition which the *Drifting Owl* had carried down from two thousand miles north had gone into the interior to search—to buy for Daniel J. Hack, their employer—some gruesome, awe-inspiring ornaments for Hack's amusement enterprises. The ornaments these men hoped to buy from the Jivaro natives were small, shriveled-up, dried, human heads.

While the hunters were away Dan Hack remained behind with Beef Mullins, Skipper Griswold, and several others.

A full week had gone by and nothing had been heard from the expedition in the hills. Back aft the yellow cook was fingering a one-stringed Chinese fiddle. Down here under the lazy warmth of the tropics the music sounded more supernatural than it does in the opium dens of Chinatown. The mascot dog, shaggy and flea-bitten, urged by the squeak of the fiddle, pointed his nose toward the silver orb of a moon and howled—aye, just as his forefather, the wolf, with his tail between his legs, howled for his mate hundreds of years before the slow change to dogdom. Probably this was the real reason why the dog howled, but Skipper Griswold saw something else in the mascot's actions.

"Aye," growled the skipper, casting a glance in the direction of the fiddling Chinese, "somebody's goin' to die."

"Bah, you believe in that rot?" sneered a scrawny-necked Chicago gutter rat who was making his first trip to sea as a mess-boy.

"Dogs, now," continued the skipper, as though he had not heard the interruption of the scrawny-necked one, "dogs, now, can see things that we poor mortals can only guess at. Sometimes I think they can see across the border-line of death. Have you ever noticed how a dog will stop suddenly, growl, put his tail between his legs and slink at his master's heels when his owner can see no apparent reason for his actions? What does the dog see?"

"Yeh," said Beef Mullins, feeling in his shirt pocket for cigarette makings, "yeh, dogs is funny creatures. Now, if as you say, someone is going to die, who is that someone?"

Beef stopped, shifted himself to a

more comfortable position on the overturned water-bucket, and looked through squinted eyes at Hack who was patrolling abaft the forward deck, always looking out toward the shore-line as though he was anxious to catch sight of an approaching party—a party which had been in the hills of Ecuador for more than a week now.

"Him, maybe, eh?" asked Beef, jerking his head in the direction of Dan Hack. "I don't know, exactly, why I should think th' dog howls for him, but——"

The dusky-faced sailor held the flare of a match to his cigarette. The light cast a glow over the seams and wrinkles. The skipper saw the nerves twitching in the sailor's neck as he sucked on the white paper column.

"Yeh," said Beef, flicking the match stick over the rail, "yeh, he's a queer chap, this Daniel J. Hack. He's a regular he-devil, if you know what I mean. His morals are all twisted up. They's only two things in Dan's brain: his shows and how to make them pile up dollars, and Asia Amerilla, the girl who went out with the expedition. He's got heaps of money, but he ain't got Asia—not yet, he ain't, but I'm afeered. aye, mightily afeered that Dan will have her yet. Unless that dog knows what he is howling for."

"Meanin' what?" asked Skipper Griswold. "You been with th' owner o' this tub for a long while, ain't you?"

"Yeh, I ought to know; I been knowin' Dan Hack ever since he lugged hay for th' bulls in th' Golden Gate Circus. Then th' shows belonged to Warbler Gobet and Dan Hack coveted them—I dunno, now, I dunno about that dog, maybe he does know what he's howlin' for. Listen!

"Th' whole thing started back there in Toledo, Ohio, when Warbler Gobet, a smile on his face and a

hole in his pocket—both quite natural for the Warbler—came up out of nowhere to take charge of th' Golden Gate Shows.

“THIS here circus what I'm tellin' you about ain't nothin' more than a few wild animals pacin' back and forth in gaudily painted cat-wagons, a pile of blue trunks and a lot of dirty canvas, with performers driftin' in from th' four quarters of th' globe to start south with her.

“We came, rags and patches, silks and satins, spangles and cheese-cloth, and dumped our baggage at th' Warbler's feet. We found him on th' lot with his high, patent-leather boots covered with Toledo mud. His big hat was pulled down even with th' range of his eyes. Th' wind whipped th' crimson scarf which was knotted loosely about his neck, and, jerking his brass-knot-studded belt a bit higher, he smiled—smiled in the face of a hard, hard world. That's why they called him Warbler; for his lips puckered up and he started to whistle away his troubles.

“‘Carry your outfit in a bag, eh?’ he said to Professor Ellowell Williams—th' Lord only knows why he called himself professor, or where he ever found such a peculiar name; for, listen, he was an Indian. I know, for the same blood runs in my veins.

“‘Yes,’ answered th' professor. His voice was not bad to listen to. He had learned much in th' white man's school. ‘Yes, the best-paying bet on the lot,’ replied the professor, suddenly dumping the bag's contents on the ground.

“‘Gosh!’ exclaimed Dan Hack, eyeing the terrible objects. He was th' only person there who did not step back and grimace at th' horrible things. He seemed fascinated. ‘Where did they come from?’

“‘Ah, my friend, dried heads,

they came from the jungles of Ecuador. The Indian head-hunters bring down their game, human game, with blow-guns, pouf! Just so!’ Th' professor guy makes a circle with his fingers, puckers up his lips and illustrates his meaning ‘pouf!’ just like that. ‘Interesting, eh?’

“‘Humph,’ grunted Hack. He stood there for a long while looking at the heads. ‘Little, ain't they?’

“‘Yes, shrunk. Hot sand and pebbles are placed inside the head after the nape of the neck has been slit and the skull removed. Then—ah! then it is turned over and over, for days. Patiently, lovingly the Jivaro does his work, slowly, until it has been—what you call it in English?—cured?’

“Hack moved from one foot to th' other, raised his cap, scratched his head with his little finger, and allowed his eyes to travel over th' little company of performers who had collected. He noted Asia Amerilla with her knees pulled almost to her chin so's to be as far away as possible from th' gruesome objects. Asia was—well, you know she's a beauty; you've seen her.

“Right then and there trouble started. At first sight of Asia Amerilla three men decided they could not live under th' same big top without owning her—now, skipper, you knows as well as Beef Mullins that they ain't never one woman made so's she could be divided 'twixt three men—ain't nowise possible. Me, I just watched what happened.

“Th' Golden Gate entrained immediately. We were billed through th' South with our objective at Tampa, Florida, where th' Warbler intended goin' into winter quarters. Everything went lovely until we reached Asheville, North Carolina. Money rolled into th' box office and th' sun seemed bent on lighting up our path. Never saw so many days without rain in all my life. We

were always one jump ahead of th' rainstorms. Professor Ellowell Williams' dried heads were th' biggest card on th' bill. He collected a quarter at his side shows for every half-dollar that went via th' main entrance to th' big top; and Warbler Gobet—well, th' Warbler couldn't stand prosperity.

"Warbler Gobet arrived perched on top of a property wagon, whistlin' and wobblin' from side to side as th' six-horse team tugged at th' teamster's handful of lines. Gobet was drunk. He'd been drunk ever since we left th' Ohio River.

"Th' tents were up in all their snowy whiteness, and while th' Warbler snored in a pile of canvas behind th' cook tent, arrangements were bein' made for th' night performance.

"Asia Amerilla had asked Dan Hack to pull up th' slack in her guy lines. I happened along just as th' professor approached th' girl.

"'Asia, have you decided to give me an answer?' asked the exhibitor of dried heads.

"'No, really, Professor, I've forgotten all about the matter. It would be well if you did the same.'

"'But, Asia, I love you——' started th' professor again. He placed a hand on her arm. Dan Hack looked up from his work with a murderous scowl on his face. It would have been well had Ellowell Williams considered Dan Hack's presence.

"'And I—I do not love you. Besides, you are a nig—nig—Indian!' exclaimed th' girl.

"'But, Asia——'

"'Say!' exploded Hack, straightening up from his work and stepping forward, fists doubled in a threatening manner, 'if you're a nigger, you cut it out! Do you know what happens to black men who look too hard on white women in this country?'

"Th' professor was fumblin' for his knife. I saw th' gleam of its blade as his hand moved from his hip. Dan

stepped back and reached for his own weapon.

"'Listen, you low-lived scum!' yelled Williams, his voice high-pitched and th' muscles twitchin' in his neck, 'I'm an Indian, I'll admit that—aye, and if this woman will admit so much, she too is of my nativity——'

"'He lies! The beast lies!' screamed th' girl, leaping at th' professor, her fingers crooked, talonlike, a veritable tigress, her white teeth showing an' th' blood poundin' in her temples.

"'Me, now, Beef Mullins, ain't goin' to stand quietly by and see men carve each other. I steps in and smooths things over. Both men stood staring at each other for a moment; then——

"'Ah, you scum, I'll have your head in my bag some of these days!' yelled Williams as he moved away, shaking his fist at Hack.

"Hack smiled—a cruel smile that burned deep into th' soul of th' Indian—aye, I, Beef Mullins, know; for ain't I felt th' stir of Jivaro blood racin' through my veins at th' insults of white men?

"'I am sorry we are not in the Oriente.' Like vitriol the words dropped from th' Indian's lips. 'I'd add your head to those in the bag—*el diablo!*'

"I HAD occasion to go out back of th' cook tent later that evening. I leaned against a wheel of th' gilded band wagon, picked my teeth with a straw, and watched silently; like th' very shadows themselves I watched.

"Dan Hack came. He passed behind th' cook tent and looked upon th' circus owner who was sprawled on his bed of canvas, one leg drawn up and a half-empty whisky bottle clutched in his hand. Gobet moved his legs, drew th' bottle up until it almost touched his lips; then—as though th' effort was too great—th' fingers re-

laxed and th' bottle slid over th' canvass mound's side.

"This seemed to amuse Dan Hack. He laughed, his hands in his pockets and his feet spread wide. He threw back his head and bellowed gleefully.

"'You drunken fool,' whispered Dan to th' unhearin' circus owner, 'I'm not half bad-looking, but I'm only a circus roustabout—feeder of elephants, cleaner of pens—which makes you ace-high with Asia. Aye, but I'll change all that. I'll have your shows before we reach Tampa.'

"Dan did not have long to wait for his chance at Warbler Gobet's shows. It was only two hours later while th' people were driftin' toward th' exits from th' big top. Saturday night. Pay day. The next day being Sunday—in keeping with Warbler Gobet's religious belief—th' shows would spend th' day on th' lot. There were a lot of little things about Warbler Gobet which caused men to like him. He was rough, tough—but th' Warbler knew God.

"Tonight there were canvasmen in muddy overalls, cooks in undershirts, performers still wearin' their tights and spangles, clowns who had not yet washed th' grease-paint from their faces, all yearnin' to take a hand in th' poker game which was sure to follow close on th' heels of th' ghost of pay day. Coins of all denominations were heaped in th' center of th' table in th' cook tent. Those who could not find room on th' long, wooden benches leaned over th' other player's shoulders.

"Th' circus owner's whistle was heard outside. They could hear his stumblin' feet and th' commotion, when he sprawled, headlong, over th' guy-lines and stakes. Several of th' men leaped to their feet to go to his assistance, but they heard his whistle—th' same which brought him th' name of Warbler—and they knew he wasn't injured.

"'Oh, ho!' he roared as he parted th' tent flaps. His red neck-scarf was

untied, his checkered vest was buttoned only at th' lower hole, his hat was crushed and dirty, and he wore only one boot. 'Oh, ho! A game and I'm not in it! Make room, boys; let th' king o' stud sit in!'

"They made room for him at th' head of th' table, with much laughter. Then th' game progressed. Soon th' coins in th' center of th' table were mixed with a scatterin' of bills, and there were not so many players left. During th' mornin' hours, one after th' other of th' men dropped out, and left Warbler Gobet playin' with th' man at th' opposite end of th' table.

"'Gettin' late, Mister Gobet,' remarked this man at th' opposite end of th' table from Gobet. This gentleman shuffled th' cards in a practised manner, slithering them, fan-shape, before him.

"'Why, Hack, you're winnin', ain't you?' asked Gobet, who was not near so drunk as he had been.

"Both men had been making heavy bets. Th' money was all goin' one way—to Dan Hack's pile. Th' Warbler saw th' receipts of th' ticket wagon slidin' toward his opponent.

"'Somethin's wrong,' mumbled Gobet, 'somethin's wrong, old-timer; you just naturally can't have such luck—square luck.'

"Th' circus owner moved down th' length of th' table. Hack moved across to th' other side so they might face each other.

"With this last move Dan Hack seemed to lose his confidence. Maybe he thought it unlucky to move to another seat.

"'We'd better stop now, Mister Gobet,' suggested Hack. He coughed nervously.

"'Ain't broke yet, Mister Hack; I'm bettin' you—I'm bettin' you'—Gobet looked at his cards—"I'm bettin' you my shows. All one big bet. My shows—lock, stock and

barrel, th' center pole thrown in—against th' pile at your elbow.'

"Warbler Gobet, now perfectly sober, leaned across th' table and glared into Dan Hack's eyes. Dan's lips were dry, and he ran his tongue out rapidly—like a snake.

"'It's gettin' late, Mister Gobet, and—and—'

"Hack ran his fingers through his hair, looked about at th' few watchers who were left, glanced at his pile of money.

"Gus Vance, boss canvasman, stepped forward as though he would interfere. Th' professor—oh, he was there!—placed his hand on th' canvasman's arm and shook his head.

"'Come on, you yellow hound—my shows against your money!'

"Th' Warbler scribbled a bill of sale on an old paper bag and tossed it into th' pot.

"Hack smiled—a pitiful, weak sort of a smile. He shoved his pile over alongside th' bill of sale.

"Warbler Gobet drew one card, and knew immediately that he was no longer owner of th' Golden Gate Circus unless Dan Hack held a mighty rotten hand. All th' circus owner had was an odd lot of cards with th' nine of clubs for high.

"Hack placed his cards on th' table, face up—he had three aces.

"'Now, Mister Gobet, if you're lookin' for a job, I'm sure Gus Vance can find a place for you among his roustabouts,' said Hack, leaning forward to scoop in th' pot.

"'No, thank you, Mister Hack. I'm going back where I came from. I'm a fish for drink when I'm prosperous. I gamble, and I cuss. Otherwise I'm just half and half. When I die I'll likely find it hard to get into heaven, because I never did anything particularly good. They will not let me in hell, because I never did anything particularly bad. You? Now, you need not worry about th' devil opening his gates for you. You've been plain lucky on this last deal. Not so

with all th' hands which went before. It's a wonder th' boys will let you live when they learn your method of play. I saw to it that this last hand was square, and so you're welcome to th' shows. I hoped to win back what you had taken from th' boys. I caught you just before you dealt this last hand—that's why I moved.'

"With this, Warbler Gobet walked to th' far end of th' cook tent, took down th' cook's mirror and smashed it into many pieces on th' table-top. Then he bowed himself out at th' door. That was th' last any of us saw of Warbler Gobet. That's how Dan Hack came to be a promoter of amusement enterprises.

"It is needless to say that Dan Hack did not allow th' shows to stay on th' lot over Sunday. To th' new owner, Sunday was just another day. He made us pull stakes and entrain for th' next jump.

"**C**REEPIN' south along th' Seaboard Air Line, several days later, Professor Ellowell Williams made a last desperate attempt to spoil Dan Hack's chances of gaining Asia Amerilla as an addition to his success.

"Th' train had stopped among th' everlastin' pines to allow th' brakeman to pack a hot-box on a sleeper. We—Dan Hack, myself, and others—were swappin' yarns of th' road back aft in a half-filled baggage car. Suddenly an enraged tigress cat—Asia Amerilla—leaped among us!

"'Look! Look!' she screamed. 'See what that fiend did!'

"'Where is he?' yelled Hack, making for th' door.

"'Wait—he's gone, there's no use trying to catch him! By this time he has lost himself among the saw grass and swamps. While I was asleep in my berth he crept in, pricked the flesh of my arm with a knife blade—a blade steeped in a poisonous derivative of *curare*, a deadly poison used by the Indians of Ecuador's interior. Then, when his work was finished, he fed me

salt and I recovered to see him escaping.'

"The girl was in tears now. Me, I knew—oh, I knew; for have I not seen the Indian use th' deadly dart in th' forests of Ecuador? Salt, plain salt, is th' only thing which will counteract its action. Th' Indian shoots monkeys with darts previously poisoned; th' little animal falls from th' tree; th' Indian captures him and immediately feeds salt. Th' result is a live monkey. Sometimes they poison th' streams to catch fish—oh, I know, I do.

"Th' professor had tattooed a peculiar set of marks across Asia's forehead. His purpose, evidently, was to spoil th' girl's attractiveness.

"'Tell Dan he can have you now, since I have spoiled your beauty!' was what Asia said he had called as he leaped for th' pines bordering th' railway tracks. 'As though Dan Hack could ever have me!' she finished.

"We ain't never seen nothin' of th' professor since then. Neither have we run afoul of Warbler Gobet. Dan Hack split th' Golden Gate into numerous shows that go north, east, south and west every season, and th' money has piled up for him. He hasn't yet been able to induce Asia to accept him.

"Th' marks on th' girl's forehead do not change her beauty to any great extent. You saw that before she left with th' expédition.

"Now, Gus Vance had pointed out to Dan Hack that th' loss of Professor Ellowell Williams and his dried heads was a blow to th' success of th' Golden Gate's side shows. Dan decided that an expedition into Ecuador for some of these heads would prove profitable. Therefore here we are on th' deck of this old tub, hard by th' coast, waitin' and watchin' for th' expedition's return, while th' danged dog howls to th' tune of th' Chinese cook's one-stringed fiddle."

"Aye," sang Skipper Griswold, "aye, howls for th' death o' someone;

I'm tellin' you someone's goin' to die."

THE little crowd collected about Beef Mullins became hushed. They looked up to find Dan Hack approaching. His face wore a worried expression.

"Skipper, do you think my men will have a hard time getting the heads?" Dan asked.

"Well, I dunno 'bout that," answered the captain, tearing his ration from a plug of tobacco with his yellow teeth. "Sometimes it's mighty hard to make th' natives part with 'em; then again, they'll sell 'emselves for a good, rusty gun. Was a time when head-huntin' was a sport with th' Jivaros; now it's a business. They discovered that th' white man would trade guns for 'em, so a feller's got to mind his eye if he don't want to lose his head.

"They's a story floatin' 'round as how a man was dead sot on gettin' a head with red hair. This gent offered a good price as a reward for such a head, and a little, sawed-off runt of an Irishman—or mebber he was Dutch or Italian, I dunno—he went back for th' head. His stay was mighty long, and th' boss got sort o' peeved about havin' to wait so long for that red-haired head.

"Finally, when th' boss had about given up ever hearin' from th' red-headed head-hunter, a native came in with a head for sale. It had red hair and—bless your soul!—it was th' red-headed head-hunter's head itself."

Hack started to join the rest in laughter at this tale. Suddenly he thought of something, and although his mouth was open and the wrinkles of laughter already formed, no sound came across his lips. A look of horror crept into his eyes.

"I say, Captain Griswold, they've been gone now almost a month. I'm rather anxious about the girl who



went back with them. I wonder—oh, pshaw, I suppose she's all right."

"I dunño, I dunno, Mr. Hack; them Jivaros are a mighty cunnin' lot. I've hearn tell as how they got th' call o' monkeys down so pat that they call th' little man-animals down out o' th' hills so they can shoot 'em with their blow-guns. I'd a heap rather be safe and sound aboard my ship than cahootin' 'round among them jungles."

After that, Hack became exceedingly nervous. He ran to the rail to look every time a boat put out, and followed the skipper around at all hours of the day and night asking questions about the head-hunters.

**W**ITHIN a few days word was brought by a half-naked native that the expedition was approaching. Not long after this they came aboard the ship, ragged, sunburned, and thin after their sojourn in Ecuador. Asia was not with them. Dan feared to ask about her. He ran to the rail, shaded his eyes, and looked out toward the shore without even greeting the newly arrived expedition.

"Well, Dan," said Gus Vance, who had headed the buyers of heads, "we've had fairly good luck."

Gus pointed to the bales coming aboard in the slings.

"Did you get the heads?" asked Dan absent-mindedly.

Dan looked about him as though he still expected to see Asia among them.

"Yes, think we got enough, and we only lost one of the party," answered Gus, running his big, red bandana handkerchief over his hot face.

"Gus, Gus! Who was lost? Not Asia!" Dan Hack was almost in tears, his lips trembled, and his hands shook as he fingered his chin.

"Now, don't fly off the handle, Dan; little things like that can't be helped. Yes, it was Asia."

"Dead?" asked Hack, hardly above a whisper.

"I don't know. Either that or else she has turned native. We went into

a village to do some trading, and she just dropped out. By the way, we met an old friend of yours in that same village—Professor Ellowell Williams. Only he don't go by that name any more. He sold us several heads."

Gus kicked a bale to indicate the heads he had reference to, and then stood watching what happened.

The members of the expedition crowded around while Dan fell to his knees on the deck and began to tear frantically at the cloth and wicker covering of the bales.

He soon made an opening. It was his property. He had paid well for it. No one interfered. Several of the heads rolled out. He examined them closely until he found one with unusually light hair, a rawhide strap fastened to the back, long cotton cords sewed through the lips to hang like a beard. This one had peculiar marks tattooed in the forehead—the same marks that Professor Ellowell Williams had pricked in the flesh while Asia was under the influence of the mystical Indian poison.

It was the end of all things for Dan Hack. To him Asia was the greatest thing in the world. The realization that his own head-hunters had brought back the head of the woman he loved was more than the amusement promoter could bear. His brain went back on him.

Not a member of the expedition will forget the scream which Dan Hack uttered and the crazy words he babbled. The dog leaped to the poop deck and began his unearthly howling. The Chinese cook, arms hidden in his baggy calico sleeves, came shuffling forward to see what the commotion was over.

"Look out!" yelled Beef Mullins. "Grab him, someone!"

Dan Hack was scrambling up the shrouds before they could stop him, before they realized what he was about, and he was soon in the rigging. He called for Asia, cursed his crew, prayed to his God, tore his hair and

beat his breast like a monkey who has lost her young, shook his fist at the howling dog, and then leaped, far out and away from the rigging, into the sea.

**B**EEF MULLINS, aided by others of the crew, put forth in a small boat. They returned half an hour later to report that Dan Hack could not be found.

"Consarn that dog!" exclaimed Beef Mullins, shaking his fist at the dog, who was slinking toward the galley with his tail between his legs.

"Aye, I told you so," chimed the captain.

"Well, I'll be——" started Gus Vance. He scratched his head thoughtfully as he looked at the heads scattered over the deck. "I wonder if Dan mistook that for Asia's head? Why, confound it, that is only Ellowell Williams' private mark. He puts it on all the heads he takes—just as a man places his stamp on soap wrappers as a trade-mark."

"Beg your pardon, sir," spoke up a sailor who had been one of the party who had gone back into the interior with the expedition; "I think this chap Hack has been fooled all around. I know where Asia is. She found her husband back there in the jungles on the same mission as our own. I think this fellow Ellowell Williams called him Warbler Gobet. This Williams party tells me as how some crook flim-flammed Asia's husband out of his shows, and that she was engaged in milking the flim-flammer of some of his ill-gained wealth before he found out that she was married. In the meantime this Gobet chap had been hunting up odds and ends—among them some dried heads—with which to start a new show."

"Gosh," mumbled Beef Mullins, throwing his cigarette stub into the sea, "I always thought Warbler Gobet and this Asia girl were kinda thick—anyways, a dog sure does know when someone's gonna die."

"Aye, aye," answered Captain Griswold.